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Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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Subject: Continued Authorization of Limited Temporary Motorized Equipment in
Wilderness 2017-2021

To: Files

This letter to the files concerns the continued authorization of the limited use of selected types of hand portable motorized equipment within limited portions of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness for the next five years (CY 2017-2021).

In 2016, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) on the Wrangell Ranger District reviewed the existing environmental analysis and past Decision Memos for the limited use of hand portable motorized winches and chainsaws within the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness. The team reviewed the conditions and uses on the ground and found the limited use of selected types of hand portable motorized equipment still fit within the past environmental analysis and decisions. The interdisciplinary team identified no significant impact on the wilderness resource from the use. It was noted that the presence of Wilderness can be an extraordinary circumstances in environmental analysis. As the legislation that designated the Wilderness provides for the temporary possession and use of motorized equipment necessary for the taking of fish and wildlife (including moose hunting), and reasonable access by rural residents to subsistence resources (including fuel wood), an extraordinary circumstance is null. Sensitive, Threatened and Endangered species considerations were updated by the IDT to include all current listings for the area. An invasive plants risk assessment was also completed for the motorized equipment project.

According to Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2012-3 Section 18.3, Reconsideration of Decisions Categorically Excluded from Environmental Documentation, no further National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) action will be taken if an interdisciplinary review shows that the proposed action still fits within the identified category, and no extraordinary circumstances exist. As the IDT found the proposal to continue the limited use of hand portable motorized winches and chainsaws still fits within the previous decisions, and no extraordinary circumstances exist; I am not issuing a new NEPA decision. The action continues to be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. The action still falls within a category established by the Chief of the Forest Service, and listed in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2014-1 (05/28/2014), section 32.12(8). That category includes the continuation of minor, short-term (one year or less) special uses of the National Forest System lands, and is cited as category 36 CFR 220.6(d)(8). This action falls within a category of actions which are not subject to administrative review (objection process) opportunities. Implementation of this decision may occur immediately.



The Wrangell District Ranger is the Deciding Official on selected types of hand portable motorized equipment permits renewals in Wilderness. On August 30, 1995, the Forest Supervisor, Stikine Area, delegated the Wrangell District Ranger the authority to approve said motorized permits, consistent with the Supervisor's July 12, 1995, Decision Notice.

Action: This letter documents the IDT analysis and my action to continue authorizing permits for hand portable motorized winches and chainsaws in a portion of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness based on the environmental analysis conducted in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. The analysis failed to identify any significant impact on the wilderness resource during monitoring of the past winch and chainsaw use. I will continue to approve temporary free annual permits for the next five years (CY 2012-2016) that will continue the possession and use of hand portable motorized winches and chainsaws within a portion of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness. Winches will be authorized for the retrieval of harvested moose during a period coinciding with the legal moose-hunting season. Chainsaws will be authorized from January 1 through April 30, and September 1 through December 31 annually, for subsistence fuel wood gathering. Use will be approved only in the Stikine River valley bottom, below the 200 ft contour line.

Section 1316 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, (ANILCA), provides for use of equipment necessary for the taking of fish and wildlife. ANILCA 803 and 811 provide for access to subsistence resources, including subsistence fuel wood. The Forest Service Manual, Alaska Wilderness Supplement (R10 Supplement 2300-2008-2 (11/25/2008), sections 2326.04c(5) and (6)), states the Forest Supervisor is responsible to approve the use of chainsaws by rural residents for subsistence fuel wood gathering, and the use of motorized hand equipment directly and necessarily related to the taking of fish and wildlife. On August 30, 1995, the Forest Supervisor, Stikine Area, delegated the Wrangell District Ranger the authority to approve said motorized permits, consistent with the Supervisor's July 12, 1995, Decision Notice. The Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan 2008, Wilderness Management Prescription, limits temporary equipment necessary for the taking of fish and wildlife to a period not to exceed one-year (Land2.E.1, page 3-14). The Forest Plan also provides for the use of motorized equipment, such as chainsaws by rural residents engaged in subsistence uses, is allowed by permit only (Subsistence. A, page 3-21). My action to issue one-year temporary permits for motorized winches and chainsaws is consistent with that Supervisor's delegation and the Forest Plan direction.

Past NEPA

The limited possession and use of selected types of hand portable motorized equipment in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness has been approved through Decision Memos, a Decision Notice, and Letters of Decision since 1992. In 1995 an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared describing the analysis conducted for a variety of types of hand portable motorized equipment in the Wilderness. The Forest Supervisor's Decision Notice of July 12, 1995, in part allowed for the use of chainsaws annually from September 1 through April 30 for gathering subsistence fuel wood, and power winches during the moose-hunting season to retrieve harvested moose. Free permits, for up to five years, authorized that equipment during 1996 through 2000. Starting in 2001, as required by the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan,

Wilderness Management Prescription, hand portable motorized chainsaws and winches have been authorized by free one-year temporary permits.

In 2000 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 interdisciplinary teams on the Wrangell District reviewed the existing environmental analysis and decision documents for the limited use of certain hand portable motorized equipment within the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness. They found that the renewal of the hand portable motorized equipment authorizations still fit within the identified category for exclusion from further environmental analysis in an EIS or EA; and there were no extraordinary circumstances. The Wrangell District Ranger issued letters on October 20, 2000 authorizing hand portable winches and chainsaws for CY 2001; on November 20, 2001 authorizing hand portable winches and chainsaws for CY 2001-2006; on May 8, 2007 authorizing hand portable winches and chainsaws for CY 2007-2011 and on December 1, 2011 further authorizing hand portable winches and chainsaws for CY 2012-2016. (FSH 1909.15, section 18.3).

Minimum Requirement Analysis

The Forest Service Manual, Alaska Wilderness Supplement (R10 ID 2300-2008-2 (11/25/2008), section 2322.03 (6)), states that management decisions affecting wilderness must be consistent with the minimum requirement concept in the Wilderness Act. A Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) using a Minimum Requirement Decision Guide or other similar two-step process is to be used. The minimum requirement concept will be applied to the prohibited uses in Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act unless the uses are authorized under ANILCA.

The Wrangell Ranger District has received applications for the possession and use of hand portable motorized equipment as needed to support moose hunting and subsistence fuel wood gathering within a portion of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness. It has been determined that certain motorized equipment is needed as a practical necessity, and to provide reasonable access, to support those activities that occur within the Wilderness.

Section 1316 of ANILCA provides for the temporary possession and use of motorized equipment necessary for the taking of fish and wildlife, including moose along the lower Stikine River. Sections 803 and 811 of ANILCA provide rural residents reasonable access to subsistence resources, including fuel wood along the lower Stikine River. The 1995 Motorized Equipment Environmental Assessment (EA) describes and analyzes alternatives to the various types of motorized equipment the public proposed for use in the Wilderness. The equipment included chainsaws, motorized winches, power brush cutters, gas powered electrical generators, and other power tools. The Forest Supervisor's Decision Notice of July 12, 1995 determined in part the minimum tools necessary to moose hunt and gather fuel wood in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness are hand portable power winches and chainsaws. The decision allowed for limited use of hand portable chainsaws in Wilderness annually from September 1 through April 30 for gathering subsistence fuel wood; and limited use of hand portable power winches in Wilderness during the moose-hunting season to retrieve harvested moose. Hand portable power winches and chainsaws continue to be the only motorized equipment considered a minimum tool, at other than permitted isolated cabin sites, in this ANILCA Wilderness. The 2008 Tongass National Forest Land and

Resource Management Plan, Wilderness Prescription (Land2.E.1, page 3-13) allows for the use of motorized ground equipment, not designed for personal transport use, at permitted cabin sites.

Following are some conditions that I will included in the temporary motorized permits for hand held winches and chainsaws to ensure protection of the wilderness resource.

1. Motorized equipment use will be limited to Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) lands in the Stikine River valley bottom. The SPM land in the valley bottom is defined as areas below the 200-foot contour line as displayed on the USGS quadrangles maps: Petersburg C-1 & C-2, and Bradfield Canal C-6.
2. Chainsaw permits will authorize use from September 1 through April 30 only.
3. Power winch permits will authorize use during a period coinciding with the moose-hunting season only.
4. Permittees will have factory installed (or equivalent) mufflers on all internal combustion engines.
5. Permittees will transport all fuel and oil in non-leaking containers.
6. After the harvest of a moose or other wildlife, permittees will be required to protect from serious damage all trees and shrubs used as anchor, snatch block, or rub point for the winch or cable.
7. After the harvest of a moose or other wildlife, permittees will clear only the limited vegetation necessary to retrieve the animal.

This letter to the files documents the analysis for approval of hand portable motorized chainsaws and winches within the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness for the next five years (CY 2017-2021).



ROBERT J. DALRYMPLE
District Ranger